

**STATEMENT OF DONALD W. MURPHY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 574, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO AMEND THE QUINEBAUG AND SHETUCKET RIVERS VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR ACT OF 1994 AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 22, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 574, a bill to amend the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor Act of 1994. The Department does not support enactment of this bill.

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, also known as The Last Green Valley, was authorized in 1994 and comprised 25 communities in northeastern Connecticut. It began receiving federal funding in 1996 and in its first four years of operation, it received \$200,000 per year. It became the first national heritage area to be managed by a non-profit organization, the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. Its first plan, *Vision to Reality: A Management Plan*, was completed in 1997.

In 1999, the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor (QSHC) was expanded to include 10 additional communities in its watershed in Connecticut and Massachusetts, making it the second bi-state national heritage area in the country. At the same time, its original seven-year authorization was extended through 2009 and a new ceiling of \$10,000,000 was authorized with an annual amount not-to-exceed \$1,000,000,

in keeping with other similar national heritage areas. At that time, *Vision 2010: A Plan for the Next Ten Years* was completed, along with the *Interpretive Initiative for the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor*. With the additional federal investment and larger regional focus, many successful programs were initiated. Appropriations from FY 1996 through FY 2006 have totaled \$5,581,000.

S. 574 would increase the ceiling on appropriations to the QSHC from \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000 and extend the termination date of the Secretary of the Interior's financial commitment from September 30, 2009 to September 30, 2027 which is inconsistent with the national heritage area program legislation passed by the Senate last year and supported by the Administration.

With regard to that legislation, a recent National Park System Advisory Board report *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas* recognized that national heritage areas need a legislative foundation that frames and supports the important role of national heritage areas in expanding conservation stewardship and in identifying and preserving significant historic resources. The national heritage area program legislation (S. 243) that passed the Senate last year and is supported by the Department would provide such a framework. The program legislation authorizes the Secretary to provide financial assistance to national heritage areas for a period not to exceed 15 years after an area is designated by Congress. Local coordinating entities that prepare and implement the management plan for the national heritage area could receive up to \$1 million per year, not to exceed \$10 million over the 15-year period. Prior to the end of the 15-year period,

an evaluation and report would be required on the accomplishments, sustainability, and recommendations for the future of each national heritage area. Extending the federal financial commitment to this heritage area is not in keeping with this framework.

During the 12 years since designated by Congress, the QSHC has accomplished many partnership-oriented projects related to resource protection and interpretation within the watershed as outlined in the management plan. Under its existing authorization, the area will continue to receive annual federal funding for three more years. As is stated in the program legislation, we would recommend that the area begin to evaluate how it will sustain its efforts to protect resources when federal funding ends in 2009.

The Green Valley Institute (GVI) is a partnership among the QSHC, the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the cooperative extension system of the University of Massachusetts. Its programs are made possible through active partnerships with many additional organizations and communities, and the active involvement of QSHC's Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee. GVI programs specifically target three local audiences: private landowners; municipal leaders and land use commissioners; and contractors, realtors and others who convert open space to other uses. Now in its fifth year, the work of GVI has been positively recognized with eight state and national awards.

GVI was created to help document, plan for and protect the priceless land-based resources of the region. Its goals are to improve the knowledge base from which land use

and natural resources decisions are made, and to build local capacity to protect and manage natural resources as the region grows.

The nearly 1,100-square miles of The Last Green Valley provide a challenge to cohesive and engaging regional interpretation of natural and historical resources. Over the past several years, QSHC has developed a number of interpretive strategies to educate residents and visitors alike, while providing an entertaining base from which to generate tourism. For example, Last Green Valley Ventures is a program that (1) circulates people and information throughout the region; (2) provides adequate visitor services, orientation to The Last Green Valley and interpretation of the many regional themes; (3) assures quality, consistency and hospitality; and (4) collects important statistical data to inform future marketing and programming. The program combines current assets of The Last Green Valley, the compendium of existing research and support brochures, the complimenting businesses offering unique experiences, and partners from public and private sectors into one cohesive product.

Last Green Valley Ventures also dovetails with an on-line educational resources guide, *Valley Quest*, used by regional educators, parents and youth group leaders to educate and inspire the future stewards of the QSHC.

Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc, who manages the heritage corridor and implements the management plan, has distributed \$1.6 million in historic preservation and partnership program grants to municipal governments and non-profits for nearly 200

projects, resulting in the leveraging of \$7 million overall. The grants have built local capacity, revitalized downtown areas, supported trail design and enhancements, improved water quality, supported economic development and tourism, just to name a few.

Local support for the QSHC is evident by the lengthy list of partners in their annual reports that includes entities from all geographic areas and mission areas. QSHC's large grassroots organization consistently has more than 100 people involved in active working committees each month. Each of the 35 towns in the region has signed a voluntary and nonbinding community compact in which the local governments accepted the goals and objectives of the Quinebaug-Shetucket management plan and formalized the towns' commitment to balance conservation and growth in their collective vision for the watershed.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.